

VOTE - Voter Outreach Through Education Washington Secretary of State

UNITED STATES AND WORLD CURRICULUM GRADES 8-12

TEACHER: LESSON 11

THEME: WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO?

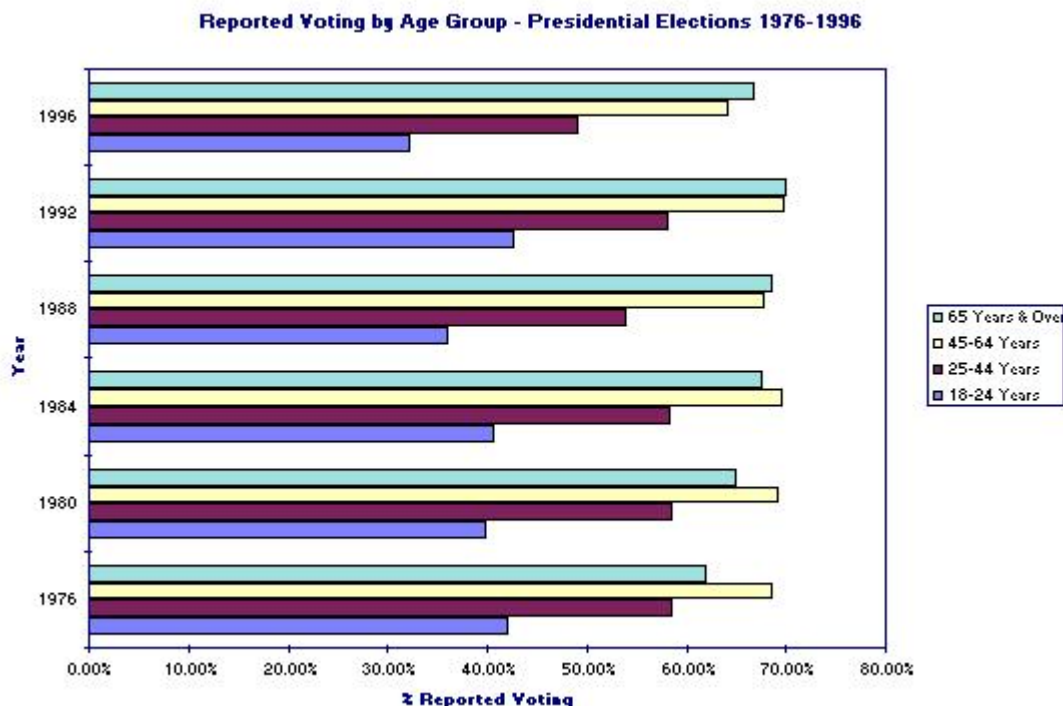
"A lot of young people don't vote because politicians don't pay attention to them. Meanwhile, politicians don't address young people because they don't vote. It's a cycle that needs to be broken."
(National Association of Secretaries of State report)

This lesson combines introductory and two follow-up activities. Students will be shown empirical evidence of the impact of individual votes on election results and on our nation's history. They will also be confronted with evidence of the relative non-participation by the youngest U.S. citizens eligible to vote, ironic as it is in light of the passage of Amendment 26 which allows 18 year olds to vote. Finally, activities will lead students to an awareness of the positive impact of civic involvement, including involvement by young people, throughout our history. This lesson is designed as a higher-level analytical lesson, therefore it is especially adaptable to an Honors or Advanced Placement class.

You should explain the terms "ignored constituency" and "vignette" which the students will encounter in their lesson. You might also wish to explain that the graph of voter turnout shows only Presidential election years; the midterm election turnout is always lower.

ACTIVITY:

For this lesson, you will need to copy and distribute to each student the lesson WHAT CAN ONE PERSON DO? and the graphic chart "Voter Turnout by Age Groups." Write the following discussion questions on the board or overhead, or copy and distribute them.



Discussion questions:

1. Is this historical evidence and the "ignored constituency" argument likely to motivate you to vote when you are able?
2. Given the age 18-24 voting statistics, do you think that the passage of Amendment 26 was a mistake?

Once students have read the quotes in the lesson and studied the "Voter Turnout By Age Group" chart (1976-1996), arrange them in small groups of three or four to address the discussion questions. Small groups will facilitate each student's engagement with the questions and with peer views in advance of a seminar with the class as a whole.

"We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."
(Preamble to the Constitution, 1787)

ACTIVITY:

Have students read the examples of civic contributions by young people in our nation that have promoted the general welfare in big and small ways. This is best read in class, either silently by each student or with several students of your choosing reading a part of it aloud in sequence.

Then, ask students to interview others, seeking further examples of civic involvement and its beneficial effects. They are asked to culminate the assignment with a well-written one-page paper that addresses these items:

1. What are the ages of the interview respondents?
2. What quote or vignette was used in the interview?
3. What is the student's own interpretation of the quote or vignette's meaning and its relevance to the focus of this entire lesson?
4. What are the five examples given by the respondents that the student considered most interesting, impressive or surprising?
5. What is a personal example from the student that shows him or her putting this quote or vignette into action already, or that reveals a desire to do so.

Ask the students to share their papers and insights with the class. You will need to determine the setting for this sharing. One option is to have each in turn share in front of the class or from a seat. Another option is to form a circle with each student facing all the others and then to allow sharing to occur in a random order. The primary focus should be on sharing their insights.